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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 14, 2009

In Today's Papers

CHP Leader Baykal: "The Ergenekon Investigation Has Lost its Reliability"

Media outlets report government and opposition leaders continued lashing out at each other regarding the latest developments regarding the controversial Ergenekon investigation. Addressing his ruling AKP group in the parliament yesterday, Prime Minister Erdogan accused the opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal, a critic of the Ergenekon investigation, of "defending the mafia and organized crime." Erdogan said his government "has no doubts about the legitimacy of the Ergenekon investigation," and he called on the CHP opposition to "let justice do its duties." Erdogan drew attention to the grenades and other weapons unearthed in recent digs in Ankara, and stressed that plans for a bloody coup massacre had been foiled by the Ergenekon investigation. He added the recent revelations in Ergenekon investigation were "just a beginning," and that more was to come.

In his party group meeting, Baykal responded to the PM, saying Erdogan was not in a position to criticize the CHP. Baykal said the latest detentions "undermined the legitimacy of the Ergenekon investigation."

Baykal noted that, following the last wave of detentions last week, the military General Staff (TGS) chief Ilker Basbug met with Erdogan and President Abdullah Gul. Three days later, the retired generals and the former head of the Higher Education Board (YOK) were released. "If you had strong evidence," Baykal asked Erdogan, "Why did you release them?" Baykal likened the Ergenekon investigation to the Reichstag fire which Hitler used as an opportunity to move in against the Communists.

Opposition MHP leader Devlet Bahceli has also stressed the importance of ensuring fair trials in the Ergenekon investigation, saying that the "legal process should not be manipulated for political goals." Bahceli warned against "those who plan to sweep to power via undemocratic means."

Mainstream Hurriyet reports the Ergenekon suspects had compiled personal information about top judicial and state officials such as the Prime Minister, the Parliament Speaker, the Foreign Minister, the Interior Minister, cabinet members and bureaucrats. Papers report the TGS said in a statement on its webpage an investigation had been initiated against Ergenekon suspect Lt. Col. Mustafa Donmez after police found arms in his summer house in Sapanca near Istanbul.

A Moment of Silence for Gaza

Media outlets today mix their international coverage of the crisis in Gaza with the domestic angle regarding an order from the Minister of Education Huseyin Celik which directed 15 million Turkish students in primary and secondary schools to observe a moment of silence at 11:00 am yesterday for the people of Gaza. Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet says "psychologists note it is not healthy to force Turkish students into feeling the trauma associated with the crisis in Gaza." Mainstream Aksam carries the front-page headline, "Rage in the Schools," next to a photo of Turkish schoolchildren holding a Palestinian flag and reading poems during the moment of silence. Mainstream Sabah reports some school children shouted "Damn Israel" immediately following the moment of silence.

Papers report Prime Minister Erdogan told his party group meeting his government had never supported anti-Semitism. On charges that his criticism of Israel had been strong, Erdogan said it "cannot be stronger than the phosphate bombs used by Israel in Gaza."

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Columnists with secularist mainstream papers are not happy with this development. Cuneyt Ulsever wrote in mainstream Hurriyet, "The AKP government has pursued a strongly pro-Hamas approach throughout this current Gaza conflict. That slant is not only isolating Turkey from the Western community, but it is also provoking dangerous anti-Semitism in Turkey." Ruhut Mengi wrote in mainstream Vatan, "In addition to the government's big mistake in favoring Hamas, now school kids are being used for political purposes. Turkey's education minister is forgetting his identity as a statesman." Haluk Sahin wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal, "Planting the seeds of hate in schoolchildren is a serious mistake and that kind of silent protest in schools is only seen in totalitarian regimes, like North Korea and Iran." Hikmet Bila wrote in leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet, "The Education Minister has made a crucial mistake. It is one thing to feel sympathy for Palestinians, but it is another to cause trauma to our school children." Sami Kohen wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "The Turkish government has preferred to engage and focus on the Syria-Hamas angle in the Middle East. Hamas only trusts Turkey, not Egypt. Ankara hopes to work on details between Hamas and Damascus which will contribute healing divisions and finalize a ceasefire agreement." Meanwhile, Nazif Gurdogan of Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak writes, "Edward Said coined the term 'asymmetric war' when referring to the brute force of the Israeli military against Palestinians who are only able to throw stones at Israel," and Gurdogan says, "Everyone must throw stones at Israel the same way they would throw stones at Satan," because, "an asymmetric war can be stopped with stones." Columnist Abdulhamit Bilici is more moderate in Islamist-oriented Zaman when he says, "It is important to have contacts with Hamas in Turkey's efforts to heal the divisions between Palestinians," but "it's important to note that Turkey does not support Hamas. It's necessary that we not forget our 400-year historical experience in Gaza."

In a related story, mainstream Hurriyet reports, "Hamas Accepts Turkish Troops," as potential peacekeepers in Gaza. Mainstream Sabah reports, "Hamas Says 'Yes' to a Ceasefire, With One Condition," and that condition is "the use of Turkish peacekeeping forces in Gaza." Mainstream Vatan reports an unidentified Hamas official who said, "Only Turkish troops will be considered for the role of international peacekeepers in Gaza."

A Photo from the front page of today's mainstream Aksam depicting Turkish schoolchildren observing a moment of silence, collecting donations, and reading poems as signs of solidarity with

Palestinians in Gaza.

Editorial Commentary on Israel-Gaza

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preferred to engage and focus on the Syria-Hamas angle in the Middle East. First of all, Hamas only trusts Turkey, not Egypt. Ankara hopes to work on details between Hamas and Damascus which will contribute healing divisions and finalizing a ceasefire agreement."

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Abdulhamit Bilici wrote in Islamist-oriented Zaman, "It is important for Turkey to have contacts with Hamas regarding Turkey's efforts to heal the divisions between Palestinians, but it's important to note that Turkey is not behind Hamas as a supporter. It's necessary that we not forget our 400-year historical experience in Gaza."

Hillary Clinton's Confirmation Hearings

Media outlets note the attention Hillary Clinton paid to issues such as Armenian genocide claims and Cyprus in her confirmation hearings yesterday. Liberal Radikal notes Clinton seeks to "use smart power" in U.S. diplomacy. Mainstream Milliyet's headline notes Clinton "Will Look at the Armenian Problem." Mainstream Hurriyet points out, "There Will Be a New Approach to Iran." Mainstream Sabah writes Clinton "Will Closely Examine Issues Such as Cyprus."

The EU Supports Nabucco Project despite the Global Economic Crisis

Mainstream dailies Sabah and Milliyet report that Russia's recent natural gas cuts have propelled the Nabucco pipeline project into action. Backed by the European Commission to reduce dependence on Russian gas, the Nabucco project has so far proved slow-moving with the necessary approvals and agreements between the countries concerned still to be signed. Nabucco Project Director Reinhard Mitschek said that "a Nabucco summit will take place in Budapest from January 26 to 27, and will bring together the ministers and the heads of governments from Austria, Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Romania and Turkey, in order to boost to the project."

The State Cuts Support to Organization Supporting Women's Shelters

Mainstream Sabah reports that State Minister for Women's and Children's Affairs, Nimet Cubukcu, announced that the government will not renew its cooperation agreement with the "Mor Cati Foundation" (Purple Roof). The Mor Cati foundation offers shelter

to battered women and their children. Minister Cubukcu said, "women and children who flee their homes because of domestic violence will be supported by state's social service institutions."

TV News (CNN Turk)
Domestic

- On Friday, UNSYG Ban Ki-Moon will pay a visit to Turkey as part of a regional tour seeking a ceasefire in Gaza.
- An IMF delegation, headed by Turkey desk chief Rachel van Elkan, is holding talks in Ankara. All calculations in talks with the IMF are based on the assumption that the Turkish economy will grow by less than 1 percent in 2009.
- Eleven doctors are taken into custody over irregularities in the procurement of medication in the southeastern city of Siirt.
- 56,700 workers lost their jobs in the industrial hub of Bursa in [2008](#).

World

- 11 PKK suspects are sentenced to between 18 months and 5 years in prison in France for staging Molotov cocktail attacks on Turkish

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bars and cultural centers in southern France.

- A Turkish-owned tanker vessel seized by Somali pirates off Yemen in November was released yesterday.
- Greek Cypriot leader Christofias sees no progress in talks with the Turkish Cypriots, adding Turks aimed at the establishment of a confederation, and not a federation on the island.
- Gazprom says it has restarted gas exports to the EU, but Ukraine refused to open its transit pipeline network at the last minute "for technical reasons."

JEFFREY